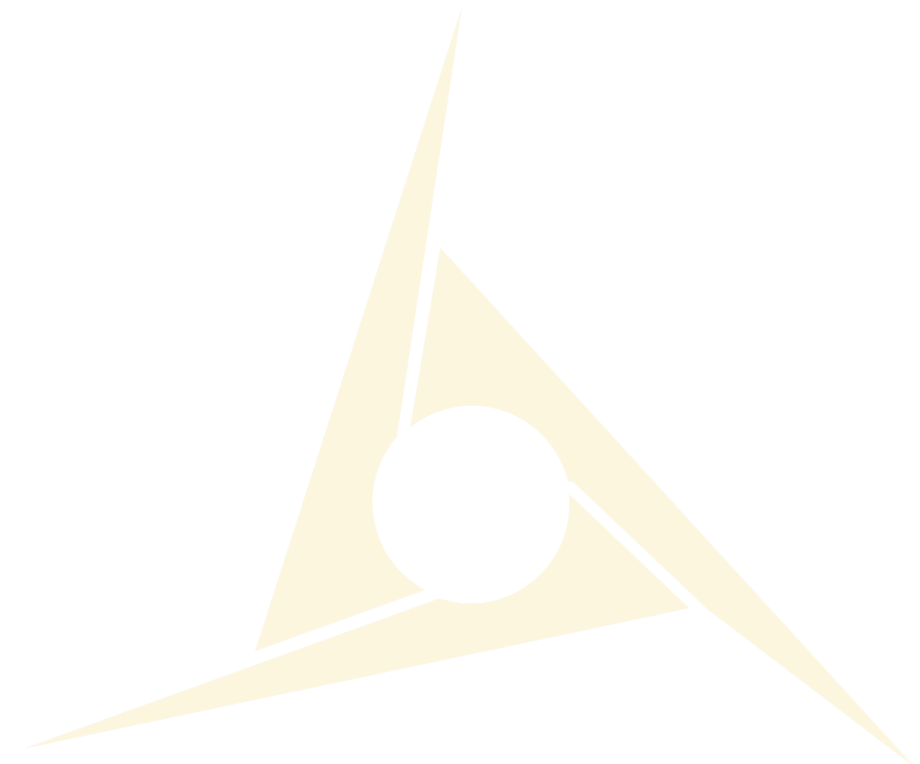


Vehicle Weight Safety Study (Assembly Bill 251) Draft Report to the Legislature

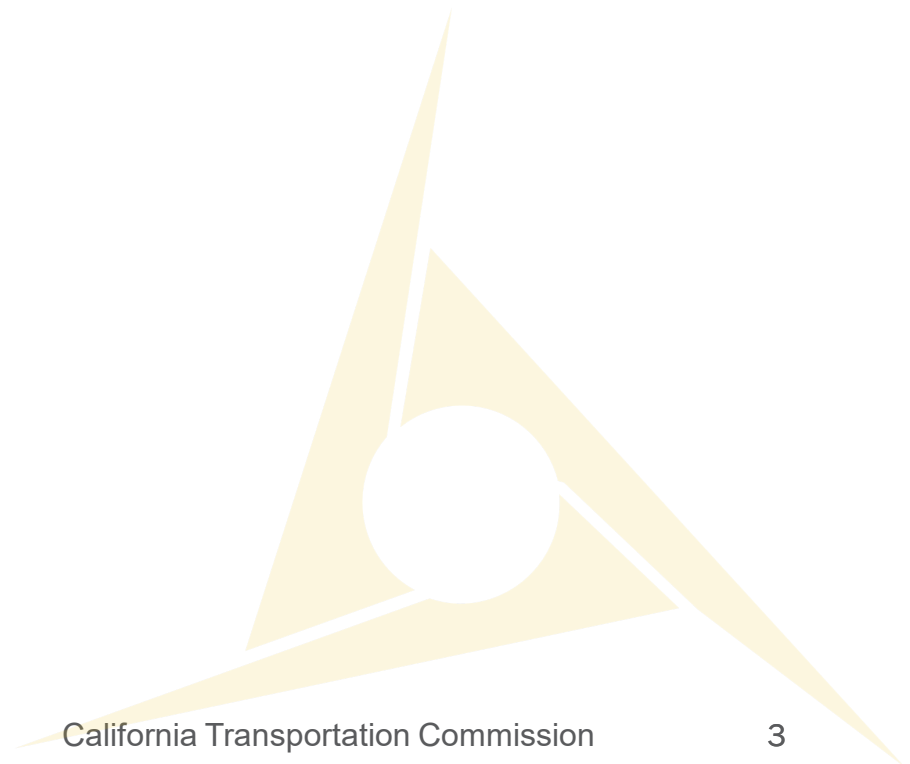
March 19-20, 2026



Agenda

- Draft Report Overview
- Draft Report Key Findings
- Draft Report Legislative Considerations
- Questions?
- Next Steps

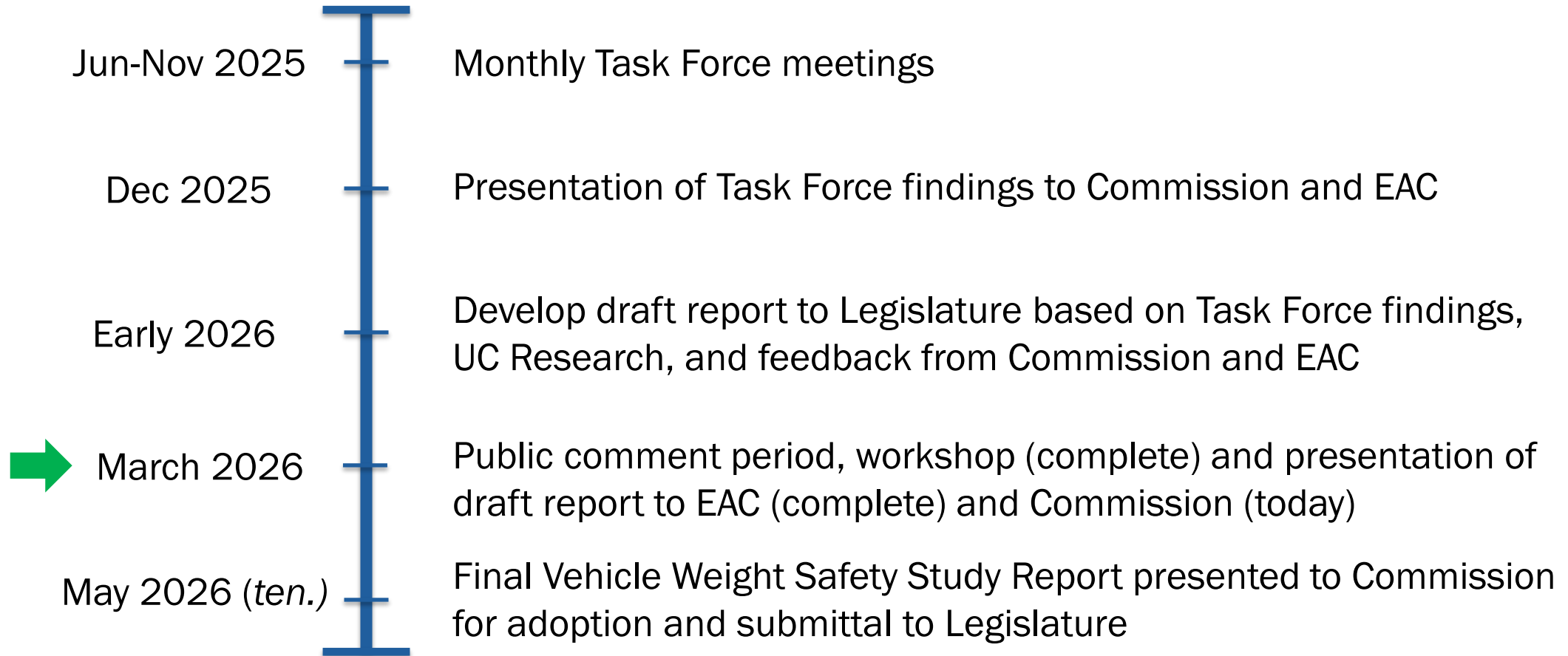
Draft Report Overview



Assembly Bill 251 Background

- AB 251 (Ward) requires the Commission to:
 - Convene a task force to study the relationship between vehicle weight and road user injuries and fatalities, and degradation of road infrastructure, equity considerations, and appropriate responses, including the potential costs and benefits of imposing a passenger vehicle weight fee.
 - Consider zero-emission vehicles and comparable internal combustion engine vehicles, existing incentives and environmental goals.
 - Submit a report to the Legislature detailing the findings of the study and any legislative recommendations.

Study Timeline



Draft Report: Report Overview

1. Introduction
2. Academic Research and key takeaways
3. Task Force process and key findings
4. Engagement and feedback
5. Draft Legislative Considerations

The Draft Report on the Commission's website and Attachment A of the agenda book item (Tab 26): <https://catc.ca.gov/programs/vehicle-weight-safety-study>

Draft Report Key Findings Background

- California was one of the first states to adopt the Safe System Approach as a policy mechanism to achieve zero fatalities and serious injuries by 2050. This is reflected in the California Transportation Plan 2050 and the State Highway System Management Plan, and further reinforced in the 2025 Joint Secretary's Policy on Road Safety (CalSTA and CalHHS).

Draft Report Key Findings Background (continued)

- However, fatality and serious injury trends amongst vulnerable road users continue to trend upwards. In 2021, pedestrians accounted for 26% of all traffic deaths and bicyclist fatalities increased 32% from the previous year.
- In response to these trends, the Commission in its 2022 Annual Report recommended the Legislature authorize a study of how larger and heavier vehicles impact vulnerable road users, which was enacted in AB 251.

Draft Report Key Findings: California Vulnerable Road User Fatality and Serious Injury Trends

Tab 26
Ref 4.8

- Pedestrian and bicyclist serious injuries and fatalities continue to increase.
- Size and weight of all passenger vehicles continue to increase. Larger and heavier vehicles also transfer more kinetic energy in collisions and impact vulnerable road users with greater force.
- Sedans are the most common vehicle type involved in fatal and serious injury crashes with vulnerable road users in all geographies. However, SUVs are expected to overtake sedans as the most registered vehicle and are the fastest growing vehicle type involved in those crashes.

Draft Report Key Findings: California Vulnerable Road User Fatality and Serious Injury Trends (continued)

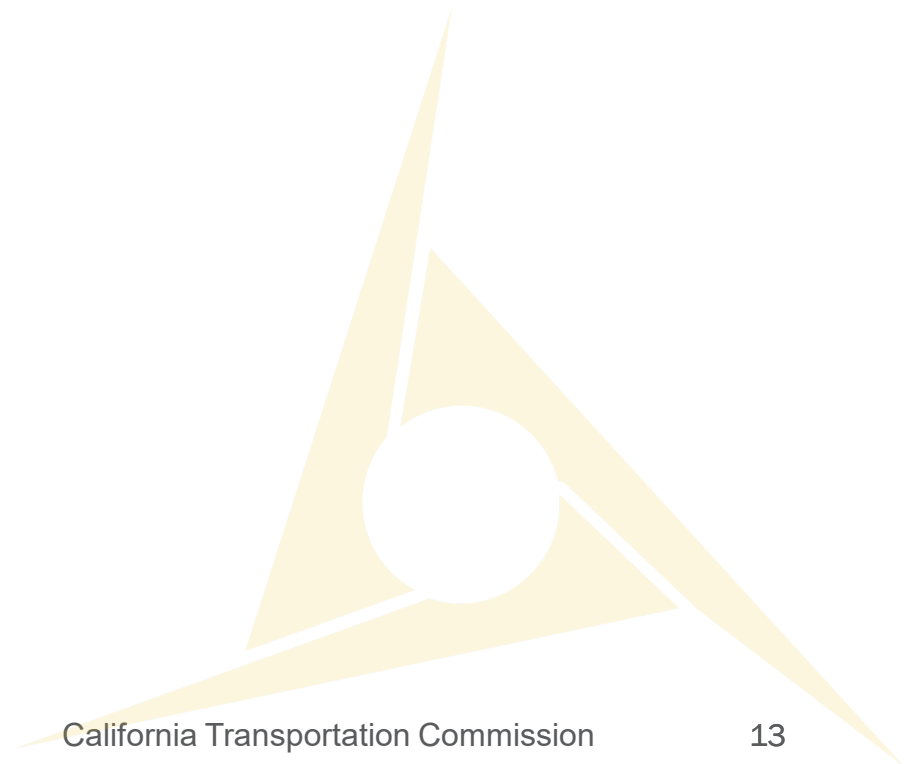
- Larger vehicle size (hood height, etc) increases the risk of fatalities and serious injuries for vulnerable road users by 26 – 44%.
- Traffic fatalities are the top cause for death for youth and affect disadvantaged communities 50% more than other areas.

- Although the research shows that growing vehicle size and weight are correlated with an increase in vulnerable road user injuries and fatalities, research does not show a sole causal relationship between the two trends due to the difficulty in isolating vehicle weight from other crash factors (such as speeding, roadway/weather conditions, distracted driving, and other road user behaviors).

Draft Report Key Findings: Regulations, Fees, and Use of Revenues

- Federal action would be needed to mandate vehicle design changes.
- A higher one-time weight-based fee (such as a sales tax) could reduce consumer demand for heavier weight vehicles across all fuel types and generate substantial revenue. Any exemptions or discounts may drastically reduce revenue generated and reinvested in transportation infrastructure and programs.
- Equitable investments in infrastructure and the safe system approach can reduce fatalities and serious injuries for all road users.

Engagement and Feedback



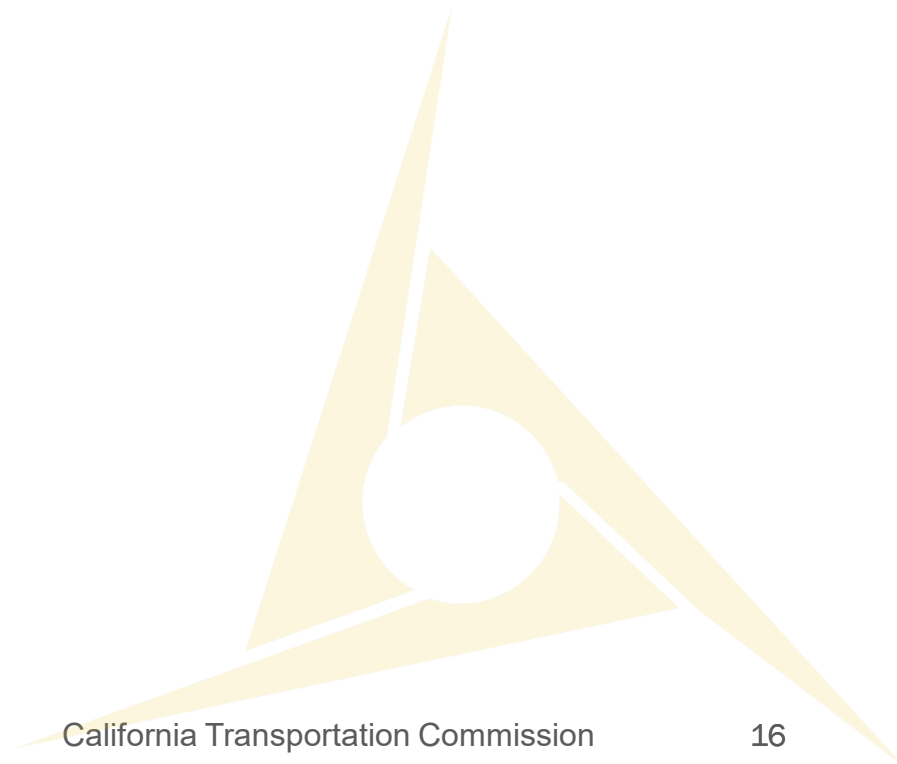
Summary of Engagement and Feedback To-Date

- **Commission Meeting Presentations:** December 2024, June and December 2025, and Today
- **Interagency Equity Advisory Committee Presentations:** December 2025 (Planning and Program Guidance Subcommittee), March 2026 (full EAC). Study updates were also provided as part of the interagency updates item in meetings in 2025.
- Other stakeholder meeting updates throughout 2025 and 2026.
- Conversations with public schools from the Bay Area, Central Coast, Central Valley, far Northern Communities, and Southern California.

Summary of Engagement and Feedback To-Date

- Consider underserved residents who have lower incomes, disabilities, or otherwise those that may be unable to afford the fee.
- Further identify nuances in collision trends such as how trends and solutions may differ geographically, including best practices from other cities and countries. Identify how fees could reduce fatalities and serious injuries amongst vulnerable road users.
- Consider the design of larger vehicles and how they may influence roadway safety.
- Further consider impacts to schools and solutions benefiting youth.
- Revenues generated from a fee should be used for infrastructure as well as funding for behavioral campaigns, safe routes to schools, and other program funding.
- Further specify the differences in road degradation impacts between electric and gas vehicles.

Draft Legislative Considerations



Potential Legislative Considerations:

- 1) Considerations for Weight-Based Fee for Passenger Vehicles
- 2) Motor Vehicle Nonoccupant Safety Assessment

Key Findings: Weight-Based Fee for Passenger Vehicles

- The research does not show a sole causal relationship between the trends in growing vehicle size and weight and increases in vulnerable road user injuries and fatalities due to the difficulty in isolating vehicle weight from other crash factors (such as speeding, roadway/weather conditions, distracted driving, and other road user behaviors).
- Growing passenger vehicle weight is not expected to have a significant impact on roadway degradation.
- A passenger vehicle weight fee is unlikely to change consumer purchase behavior unless it were extremely large.
- **For these reasons, implementing a passenger vehicle weight fee is not being recommended.**

Draft Legislative Considerations: Weight-Based Fee for Passenger Vehicles

If the Legislature chooses to address these trends by imposing a passenger vehicle weight fee, it should consider:

- Calibrating the fee amount to differences in vehicle weight, while balancing against undue cost burdens for vehicle owners and administrative feasibility and cost.
 - Existing DMV programs and processes could potentially be leveraged to provide equity-based relief to vehicle owners, depending on the Legislature's priorities (for example, using vehicle value or disabled person license plates as a factor in determining the fee amount).

Draft Legislative Considerations: Weight-Based Fee for Passenger Vehicles

If the Legislature chooses to address these trends by imposing a passenger vehicle weight fee, it should consider:

- Reinvesting revenues from a potential fee in existing programs that enhance roadway safety to provide benefits to all users, and vulnerable road users in particular, using the Safe System Approach (for example, the Active Transportation Program or programs focuses on behavioral factors, such as awareness campaigns and advertising).

Draft Legislative Considerations: Weight-Based Fee for Passenger Vehicles

If the Legislature chooses to address these trends by imposing a passenger vehicle weight fee, it should consider:

- Applying the fee annually at vehicle registration to minimize administrative costs.
- Setting a fee amount that accounts for engine type, to avoid disincentivizing adoption of zero-emission vehicles (e.g. battery electric and fuel cell vehicles), which tend to be heavier than internal combustion engine equivalents.

Draft Legislative Considerations: Weight-Based Fee for Passenger Vehicles

If the Legislature chooses to address these trends by imposing a passenger vehicle weight fee, it should consider:

- Considering a fee in the broader context of the state’s need for a sustainable funding mechanism for transportation infrastructure, as described in the Commission’s 2025 State and Local Transportation System Needs Assessment.
 - The Needs Assessment identifies a funding shortfall of \$215.7 billion over the next 10 years to adequately address California’s transportation infrastructure needs, including bicycle and pedestrian facilities; local streets and roads; highways, bridges, and culverts; capital and operational needs of transit, commuter rail, and intercity rail systems; and costs related to system resiliency.
 - Developing a sustainable funding mechanism to comprehensively address this shortfall will allow for greater levels of investment in transportation infrastructure that enhances safety for users of all modes, including vulnerable road users.

Key Findings: Motor Vehicle Nonoccupant Safety Assessment

- Historically, the focus of Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS) has been on improving safety of vehicle occupants as opposed to persons outside the vehicle. In contrast, countries similar to the United States require vehicle testing for pedestrian collision outcomes, such as the European New Car Assessment Programme.
- In addition to safety features mandated by FMVSS, the automotive industry has advanced integration of optional vehicle safety features, such as automatic emergency braking (AEB) preceding federal standards.

Draft Legislative Considerations: Motor Vehicle Nonoccupant Safety Assessment

- To provide more complete information to consumers about safety impacts to persons outside of a motor vehicle, **the Legislature could consider** establishing a voluntary motor vehicle safety rating program specific to vehicles sold in California that considers safety outcomes for occupants and nonoccupants, including vulnerable road users.
- This program could be administered through partnerships with private industry and the non-profit sector.
- Such a program would only apply to passenger vehicles with the intent of providing better information regarding safety features in passenger vehicles to potential buyers.
- Although administrative costs to implement such a program are unknown at this time, such a program should include appropriate incentives for manufacturers to choose to participate on a voluntary basis.

Next Steps

- **April 1, 2026:** Draft report public comment period concludes. Comments can be submitted to Cayla.mcdonell@catc.ca.gov.
- **May 2026** (anticipated): Final report presented to Commission for approval and transmittal to Legislature

Questions?

Thank you

Cayla McDonell
Associate Deputy Director
Cayla.McDonell@catc.ca.gov

